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## THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM OF LOS ANGELES.

J. M. GUINN.

(Delivered before the History Section of the Southern California Teachers' Association, December 23, 1909.)

The subject upon which I am to address you this afternoon is not one of my own choosing. It was assigned me or I was assigned to it. It reads "Beginnings of the School System of Los Angeles." The originator of that title evidently thought that the Los Angeles school system had several beginnings—that it broke out at certain times like juvenile epidemics, such as whooping cough, measles, or mumps.

In the one hundred and twenty-eight years that have passed since good old Governor Filipe de Neve and his little band of pobladores founded the Pueblo de Nuestra Señora La Riena de Los Angeles (the town of our Lady the Queen of the Angels), Los Angeles has had several school systems, and I might add several schools without system. A certain ancient party very much addicted to matrimony once remarked "There is nothing new under the sun." In an historical review of the schools of Los Angeles under the rule of Spain, of Mexico and the United States that I propose to give, I shall endeavor to show that some of the fads and foibles that have been inoculated into or engrafted upon our system of late years had their counterparts in the olden time, that some of the methods and theories that we point to with pride now, had their beginnings in the dark ages of the profession. These have been developed and built into a system by successive generations of teachers.

The evolution of a school system in Los Angeles was slow. The conditions incident to its development were not favorable. Not one of the original settlers of the town could read and write. They were an easy-going *poco tiempo* sort of people, content to labor and wait, particularly to wait. They were so slow that it took them thirty-six years to open a school and forty years to start a graveyard.

Maximo Pino was the pioneer schoolmaster of Los Angeles. He taught during the years 1817 and 1818. His salary was \$140 a year. After two years of brain fag the school took a vacation of ten years to allow the knowledge acquired time to settle. The people then were opposed to educational cramming just as they are in theory today.

During the Spanish era in California the schoolmasters were mostly superannuated soldiers grown too old to be of use at their trade of killing. They possessed that dangerous thing, 'a little learning.' About all they could teach was reading, writing and the doctrina Christiana or catechism. The school system of these old masters was like that laid down by Pete Jones for the Hoosier schoolmaster—"No lickin, no larnin," said Pete. These were not the days of painless education.

Draco, an old Spartan code commissioner, had but one penalty for all crimes—death. The least, he said, deserved death, and there could be no greater for the greatest. The old soldier schoolmasters had but one penalty for all juvenile offenses—whipping. Whether the offense was a blot on his copy book, or neglect to commit to memory the doctrina, the penalty was a scourging with a hempen cat-o'-nine-tails, and the yells the culprit emitted were the beginnings of the class yell, and the dullest boy was usually the yell leader because he had the most practice. So you see that the class yell instead of being an innovation of a decade or two ago is a century old.

Mexico did better for education in California than did Spain. The school terms were lengthened. The first school of which we have any record in the Mexican regime was taught by Luciano Valdez. He kept the pueblo school open at varying intervals from 1827 to 1832. Luciano was one of the martyrs of the profession sacrificed on the altar of a system. The following entry in the minutes of the Ayuntamiento or town council proceedings (the members of which acted as a board of education) tells his fate:

"The Most Illustrious Ayuntamiento dwelt on the lack of improvement in the public school of the pueblo, and on account of the necessity of civilizing and morally training the children it was thought wise to place citizen Vicente Morago in charge of said school from this date, recognizing in him the necessary qualification for the discharge of said duties; allowing him \$15 monthly, the same as was paid the retiring citizen Luciano Valdez."

The regidores of the Ayuntamiento had been educated under the old soldier system of "no lickin, no larnin," and when Schoolmaster

Valdez spared the rod, in their estimation he spoiled the child, so they discharged him. Valdez lost his job and the profession lost a reformer.

Schoolmaster Morago flagellated and civilized the village school boys for a year and a day; then he was appointed secretary of the Ayuntamiento at the munificent salary of \$30 monthly, so he resigned. Francisco Pantojo was appointed preceptor of the public school. He wielded the birch or plied the ferule to January, 1834; then he demanded that his salary be increased to \$20 per month. The Ayuntamiento refused to grant it and have left this stigma on Pantojo's professional ability: "At the same time, seeing certain negligence and indolence in his manner of advancing the children, it was decided to procure some other person to take charge of the school." Citizen Cristoval Aguilar was appointed to the position at \$15 per month. So Francisco Pantojo quit the profession. The Ayuntamiento proceedings of January 8, 1835, tell the fate of Aguilar: "Schoolmaster Cristoval Aguilar asked that his salary be increased to \$20 per month. After discussion it was decided that as his fitness for the position was insufficient, his petition could not be granted." So Aguilar retired from the profession, another victim to the system of \$15 monthly.

Then Vicente Morago, whom either the machine or the good government organization had fired out of the office of syndic or town treasurer, took up the discarded pedagogical birch and resumed his old occupation at the old salary of \$15 per month. The system had fixed the standard of fitness for the schoolmaster of the pueblo by his capacity to subsist on \$15 per month.

In 1836 and 1837 the pueblo school took a two years' vacation. The civil war between Monterey and Los Angeles was raging and the big boys were needed for soldiers. This was the beginning of military instruction of the school boys of Los Angeles. Some of them participated in the bloodless battle of San Buenaventura when the mission building was severely wounded in several places. They could hit a mission, but not a man. Others of them took part in the battle of Las Flores where the rawhide barricades of General Tobar were battered down and the army of Carlos Carrillo, the Pretender, captured.

Don Ygnacio Coronel took charge of the public school July 3, 1838, "he having the necessary qualifications, he shall be paid \$15 from the municipal funds and every parent having a child in the school shall be made to pay a certain amount according to his means." So say the records. This was the beginning of the system or rate bills that was continued for more than twenty years under

American rule. Coronel taught at various times between 1838 and 1844, the length of term depending on the condition of the public funds and the liberality of the parents. Don Ygnacio's methods were a great improvement on those of the soldier schoolmasters. There was less lickin and more larnin. His daughter, Señorita Soledad, was his assistant. She was the first woman teacher of Los Angeles. She introduced music into the school. When a class had finished a book or performed some other meritorious educational feat, as a reward of merit she improvised a dance in the schoolroom and played on the harp that you may still see in the Coronel collection in the Chamber of Commerce. She was the first teacher to introduce gymnastics into the schools of Los Angeles and she taught the first girls' school. She deserves a monument. Governor Arellaga years before had declared against teaching girls to write, fearing that they would waste their time in writing love letters.

The most active and earnest friend of the public schools among the Mexican governors was the much abused Micheltorena (I am glad to say we have a schoolhouse named for him). He made a strenuous effort to establish a public school system in the territory. Through his efforts schools were established in all of the principal towns and a guarantee of \$500 from the territorial funds was promised each school. This was the beginning of state aid to the schools —before that time the schools had been supported from local funds.

January 3, 1844, a primary school was opened in Los Angeles under the tutorship of Ensign Guadalupe Medina, an officer in Micheltorena's army, permission having been obtained from the governor for the lieutenant to lay down the sword and take up the pedagogical birch. Medina was an educated man and taught an excellent school. His school attained an enrollment of 103 pupils. It was conducted on the Lancasterian plan, which was an educational fad imported from Europe via Mexico to California. This fad, once very popular, has been dead and forgotten for half a century or more. The gist of the system was that the nearer the teacher in education to the pupil the more successful he would be in imparting instruction. So the perceptor taught the more advanced pupils; these taught the next lower grade, and so on down the line to the lowest class. By this system it was possible for one teacher to instruct or at least to manage two or three hundred pupils. It was a very economical system and as inefficient as it was economical. Don Manuel Requena, the alcade, in an address to the outgoing Ayuntamiento, speaking of Medina's school, said, "One hundred and three youths of this vicinity made rapid progress under the care of the honorable preceptor and showed a sublime spectacle announcing a happy future." The happy future of the school was

clouded by the shadow of a shortage of funds. The superior government notified the Ayuntamiento that it had remitted the \$500 territorial funds promised, and great was the gratitude of the regidores thereat, but when the remittance reached the pueblo it was found to be merchandise instead of money. The school board (regidores) filed an indignant protest, but it was merchandise or nothing; so after much dickering the schoolmaster agreed to take the goods at a heavy discount and dispose of them as best he could. Medina was the first to introduce commercial and manual training into the school system of Los Angeles. The big boys assisted the schoolmaster in disposing of the sombreros, rebosas, panas colorados, and abalaris that made up the school fund. They carried the goods to the purchasers, kept accounts and figured the percentages of profit and loss to the schoolmaster.

Medina was the first teacher in Los Angeles to hold an examination and give an exhibition of the pupils' progress. The patrons of the school were so delighted that some of the leading men of the pueblo made educational addresses. They were so pleased with their own orations that they had them copied and sent to the governor to show him the great progress the school was making. Could these old orations of sixty-five years ago be resurrected they might furnish some of our stock institute orators with new ideas for a generation to come. A few months later Medina was compelled to lay down the pedagogical birch and take up the sword. Los Angeles was in the throes of one of its periodical revolutions. The schoolhouse was needed by Pico and Castro for army headquarters and the big boys for soldiers. So the pupils were given a vacation —a vacation that lasted five years. The next year (1846) the Gringos conquered California and when school took up again the country was under a different government.

There was no co-education and no girls' school under Mexican rule. Very few of the girls received any education. They were taught to embroider, to cook, to make and mend the clothes of the family and their own, and these accomplishments were deemed sufficient for women. Governor Micheltorena attempted to establish girls' schools in the territory. He appointed Senora Luisa Arguello to open a girls' school in Los Angeles, but there is no record that she kept a school. And shortly afterwards a revolution headed by Pio Pico and Castro drove Micheltorena out of the country.

From an inventory made by Lieut. Medina we ascertain the amount of school books and furniture it took to supply a school of a hundred pupils sixty-five years ago; primers, 36; second readers, 11; Friar Ripalde's Catechisms, 14; table to write on, 1; benches, 6.

School supplies were few and inexpensive. Here is the expense account of the public school from February to December, 1834, ten months: primers, \$1; blackboard, \$2; earthen jar for water, \$2.50; ink, \$1; string for ruling blackboard, 50 cents; ink-well, 37 cents; total, \$7.37. Church incidentals for the same time, \$96. The people were more anxious about the hereafter than the here.

The pueblo owned no schoolhouse, either the Ayuntamiento or the teacher rented one. At one time a fine was imposed on a parent who failed to send his children to school, but the fines were never collected. There was no parental home for truants.

There were well educated and intelligent men among the wealthy class of the native Californians, but the common people were ignorant of, and indifferent to, book learning; and the children in their affection and filial reverence for their parents were unwilling to know more than their progenitors.

The discovery of gold at Coloma in 1848 carried away nearly all of the male population of Los Angeles to the mines. The standard wages of \$15 a month for the pueblo schoolmaster was not sufficient to tempt even faithful old Vicente Morago to take up the pedagogical birch in the flush days of "49." There is a contract of record in the old archives between the Ayuntamiento and Francisco Bustamente, an ex-soldier, dated June 1, 1850, in which he agrees to teach the children first, second and third lessons, and likewise to read script, to write and count, "and so much as I may be competent, to teach them orthography and good morals." Bustamente was sure of his capacity to teach counting, but was shaky on spelling and good morals. His pay was \$60 per month. He taught a term of six months and then asked for an increase of wages on the plea that he had a very large family and could not make ends meet out of his salary. The board of education promptly discharged him, but whether on account of his numerous children or failure to support them out of his salary the record does not say.

In 1850 the Ayuntamiento was merged into the City Council. The councilmen acted as a board of education, the same as the regidores of the Ayuntamiento had formerly done. The first attempt to establish a school for higher education was made in 1850. George Wormald asked permission to establish "a Los Angeles lyceum in which the following subjects shall be taught: Reading, penmanship, arithmetic, geography, Spanish grammar, double entry bookkeeping, religion, history, and the English and French languages." His application was referred to a committee, who rejected it. His course of study was top-heavy for the capacity of the pupils of that day, and his religion was not of the right kind.

The first school ordinance under American rule was passed July 9, 1851. Article one provided that a sum not exceeding \$50 per month should be applied toward the support of any educational institution in the city, provided that all the rudiments of the English and Spanish languages be taught therein. For instruction in the higher branches the parents were to negotiate with the owners of the school.

The early schools seem to have been run on the go when you please principle both on the part of the pupils and the teacher. The school committee of the council reported having visited the public school twice without having found the children assembled. The committee, however, had arranged with the honorable preceptor for a full attendance next Friday.

Under Spanish and Mexican rule and continued into the first years of the American regime, there was a practice of allowing a pupil a holiday on his patron saint's day. As every pupil had a patron saint and every saint had a day assigned him in the calendar, there was a continuous run of holidays in the schools.

On August 13, 1852, an ordinance was passed by the city council fixing a levy of 10 cents on the \$100 for the support of the schools. This was the first school tax levy ever made in the city. Previous to that the school fund was derived from licenses, fines, etc. On July 25, 1853, an ordinance was passed for the establishment and government of the city public schools. Having established a public school system the council then stopped the payment of subsidies to private schools. At the meeting of the city council, May 20, 1854, Stephen C. Foster, the mayor, was appointed city superintendent of schools and Manuel Requena, Francis Mellus and W. T. B. Sanford, three members of the council, were constituted a Board of Education. There was no conflict between that Board of Education and the city council. The Board of Education and the Superintendent set vigorously to work and by the beginning of the next year (1855) had erected the first school building that Los Angeles ever owned; it was a two room brick building located on the northwest corner of Spring and Second Streets where the Bryson building now stands.

Wm. McKee, an educated young Irishman, was the second principal. He was the first teacher to attempt the ornamenting of the school grounds with shade trees. The *Los Angeles Star* of March 17, 1855, in an able editorial urged the planting of trees on the school lot. "When the feasibility of growing trees upon the naked plain is fairly tested the owners of lots in the neighborhood of the school will imitate the good example," said the *Star*—to test the feasibility the Board of Education bought a dozen black locusts and had them planted on the school lot. The trees grew but when the green feed on the "naked plains" where the Boston Store,

Coulters and the City Hall now stand dried up, the innumerable ground squirrels that infested the mesa made raids on the trees, ate the leaves and girdled the branches. To protect the trees McKee procured a shot-gun and when he was not teaching the young ideas to shoot he was shooting squirrels.

There was no water system then in the city and water for domestic purposes was supplied by carriers from carts. McKee used water from the school barrel to water the trees. The hombre who supplied it reported to the Board of Education that the Gringo *maestro de escuela* (schoolmaster) was wasting the public water trying to grow trees on the mesa where any fool might know they would not grow. The school-grounds were enclosed by a Mexican picket fence, a structure made by interlacing willow poles with a network of rawhide thongs. It was not ornamental nor aesthetic but very useful in protecting the trees from straggling cattle and predatory mustangs who had the freedom of the streets in those days. The trees thrived despite the squirrels and the waterman's wrath. They were cut down in 1884 when the school lot was sold to the city for a city hall.

In the early '50's there was no uniform course of study in the country schools and no certain time for opening school. Each teacher formed his own course of study and the schools began any old time and continued as long as the public funds lasted, which was usually about three months.

The late Thomas J. Scully was the first teacher to establish a uniform course of study in the country schools. Scully was a graduate of the Toronto Normal school and probably was the first Normal school graduate to teach in our schools. In 1854-55 there were but four country districts in Los Angeles County, which included all the territory now in Orange County and about half of Kern. Scully would begin school about the first of the year say in the northern district, teach until the funds were exhausted, then packing his course of study and his ferrule in his saddle bags and mounting his mustang he moved on to the next district, and then to the next. In this way he was enabled to give the schools a uniform course of study and no change of teachers. In his pedagogical peregrinations, Scully finally reached a certain district where, neglecting the advice of the late Samivel Weller "beware of vidders," he was captured by the black eyes and winning smiles of a little widow. He laid down his ferrule, discarded his course of study, married and turned his attention to cultivating his wife's vineyards and making wine. To beat the tariff he found a home market or rather a market at home for a considerable quantity of his wine, and domestic infelicity followed. A social

eruption threw him outside the family circle. He reformed, took up the ferrule and waved it successfully until his death some twelve years ago. He was a genial whole-souled man liked by everyone who knew him. He was at the time of his death the Nestor of Los Angeles pedagogues.

Passing rapidly down the corridors of time we come to the beginning of teachers' institutes in Los Angeles County. The first one was organized in the Old Bath Street school building, October 31, 1870. This building was located north of the Plaza on what is now North Main Street. It was held there because the school house on the corner of Spring and Second Streets was too far out of town. There were no hotels or stores then south of First Street. All the business of the city was in the neighborhood of the Plaza.

The officers of that institute were Wm. M. McFadden, County Superintendent, President; J. M. Quinn and T. H. Rose, Vice-Presidents, and P. C. Tonner, Secretary. All these except the undersigned have passed over the divide between time and eternity. The entire teaching force of the city schools consisted of eight teachers; of the county (which then included all the area now in Orange) thirty all told and all present. The site of Pasadena then was in an indifferent sheep pasture, Pomona a cattle range, and Long Beach had not even a lone fisherman for an inhabitant.

The institute was pronounced a decided success by those who participated in it. One small school room held all the members and the audience, and still there was room for more. In that institute we observed or practiced one of the slogans of modern Los Angeles—"boost home products." All our essays, orations and exemplifications of methods were home made—home products. We had no money to hire pedagogical evangelists at so much per day and traveling expenses. There was one illustration of a method at that institute the most forceful I have ever known. A certain expedagogue, whom I shall call Prof. R., read a paper on scolding. Scarcely had he finished before a lady sprang to the floor and began to soundly berate the professor. At first we supposed she was giving an object lesson in scolding to illustrate the professor's essay. But when she shrieked out, "He's a thief, he stole my well," State Superintendent Fitzgerald, who was presiding, remarked in his blandest tones, "Madam, I do not find your exercise down on the program and I shall have to call you to order." We all regretted that he did not ask her to explain the professor's feat in physics, the carrying off of her well which was a hole in the ground. It was as difficult a feat as stealing the hole out of a doughnut without taking the doughnut.

The Los Angeles High School was established in September,

1873. It was the first high school founded in Southern California. Then there were then but seven in the entire state. Now there are seven in Los Angeles City alone and in the state they are legion. As late as 1868 the male teachers were in the majority in the county, the count standing schoolmasters, 17; schoolmistresses, 10. In all the years since then the masters have steadily gone down in relative numbers and the mistresses have gone up, and now the lords of creation in the profession are reduced to the condition foretold by the old prophet: when seven women shall lay hold on one man, the relative numbers in the profession standing about seven females to one male outside of the high school.

As I said in the beginning, the fads and the foibles, the theories and the methods of long ago have their counterparts and their reincarnations in our educational systems of today. The question of compulsory education was fought to a finish in the county institutes of California nearly forty years ago. I recall an institute held in the old Leck hall on Main Street when the pros and antis throughout an autumn day wrangled over the question. The pros won. A law was enacted by the legislature which purported to be an act to protect the rights of school children. Every parent was required to send his child of school age to school at least twelve weeks during the year. There was a fatal defect in the law's enforcement. Some one had to swear to a complaint against the delinquent parent and have him haled before a judge and punished. It was easier and safer to let the delinquent parent's progeny go unschooled than get yourself hated and possibly hurt. I never heard of but one attempt at enforcement and that was up in the Tulare country. A justice of the peace had a grouch against a neighbor who was neglecting his duty to his family. So the judge haled his neighbor before him and fined him a hundred dollars. The irate parent refused to pay the fine, whipped the judge and went unwhipped of justice himself. The law remained on the statute books in a state of innocuous desuetude for a decade or two and was then wiped off for a better one.

Even that modern fad of open air schools now prevailing in New York, Chicago and other eastern cities, where teachers and pupils bundled like arctic explorers keep school on the top of sky scrapers with the thermometer at zero—even this, barring sky scrapers and zero weather, had its counterpart in early Los Angeles. The first school in San Gabriel was taught under the spreading branches of a giant live-oak. The sides of the school house were made of wild mustard stalks tied to a frame-work with rawhide thongs. It needed no plenum system of fans and thermostats to ventilate that school house.

Domestic science, too, had its crude beginning away back in the dark ages of our school system. In early times it was difficult for the teachers in the country schools to find boarding places. The houses usually contained but two or three rooms and the families were large. In the Upper Santa Ana district, which was settled by Spanish people, the trustees partitioned off one end of the school house for a cooking room and fitted it up with a stove and other culinary articles for the teacher to board himself. The schoolmaster assisted by the big girls prepared lunch. He taught them the Americano methods of cooking, and if he was a jolly good fellow he shared with them the toothsome viands prepared by the joint efforts of both. It was a picnic for pupils but might mean poverty for the preceptor as he had to provide the viands and the girls had vigorous appetites.

There was another branch of domestic science taught in the schools. For twenty years after the establishment of a public school system in Los Angeles, the teachers, assisted by the big boys and girls, did the janitor work. They swept and dusted the school rooms and built the fires. It is needless to say that that branch of domestic science was not a picnic. A teachers' strike resulted in the employment of janitors in the city schools but it was a decade later before they were employed in the country schools.

The first kindergarten in California was opened in Los Angeles about 1872. Miss Merwhedel, a pupil of Froebel's, was the pioneer kindergartener of the state. She opened a school in the old Round House which stood at the entrance to the Garden of Paradise on Main Street just below Third. The Round House was a circular adobe structure built by an eccentric sailor for a residence in the early '50's. George Lehman bought it and the grounds belonging to it and fitted them up for a suburban pleasure resort and named the grounds the Garden of Paradise. To make his garden more realistic he placed in it plaster of Paris statues of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and the old serpent. The tree of knowledge was an orange tree. The grounds extended from Main to Spring Street. On Spring Street front was a thick cactus hedge which was more effective in keeping intruders out of Paradise than a flaming sword.

When Miss Merwhedel opened her school in Paradise, Adam and Eve had been driven out, the old serpent had been scotched, and the tree of knowledge cut down to prevent bad little boys from breaking the windows of the adjoining houses in their attempts to knock down the forbidden fruit. Amid such scriptural surroundings the kindergarten began its career. It was something unheard of by the average resident. Two citizens discussing it, one asked the other, "What is this kindergarten business down in the Round House?"

"That sign," said the other, "is spelled wrong. It should be a kinder of a garden. The little kids play that the school is a kind of garden and they play they are flowers. They sing songs and cut up funny capers."

It may seem to you from the trend of my discourse that I have been burlesquing and poking fun at the efforts of the pioneer teachers of California in building up a school system. Not so! I am one of them. I taught my first school in California forty-five years ago. I have seen the school system of California evolve from chaos to completeness or at least near to it. For the first twenty years after a public school system was established in Los Angeles the city superintendents were merchants, lawyers, doctors, preachers, anything but teachers. Public sentiment relegated the teacher to the roll of incompetents—unfit to wrestle with the business end of his profession, a sort of a mild lunatic harmless among children but hurtful among business men.

The pioneer teachers were missionaries—not, however, of the revival evangelist kind who make converts by the wholesale. Our work of converting was a slow and tedious process of overcoming the prejudice and penuriousness of our patrons. The school patron of our day was the mid-century man of the last century. He was the product of the school of the three R's. He had battled with adverse forces of nature as a pioneer settler in the Far West, and had won out. He had little toleration for new fangled methods in education and far less for paying teachers liberal wages. I recall the attitude of one member of the Board of Education on the wage question when I was city superintendent of the Los Angeles schools twenty-five years ago. His standard of wages for all women teachers was \$30 a month. A servant girl worked thirty days for a month and twelve hours a day for \$20. The woman teacher worked twenty days for a month and six hours a day. Why should she receive more? He was willing to compromise on \$30 but that was his limit.

The battles for higher education, for improved methods, for better pay were fought to a finish by the pioneer teachers. The liberality of the patrons of the schools now is the crop from the seed sown years ago by the pioneer teachers. A word of warning: do not abuse that liberality, do not be too lavish in your expenditures, do not be too importunate with the unceasing cry of give! give! give! There may be a reaction, there may be a rebound. I have seen the hands on the dial of progress turned back by injudicious demands and unreasonable exactions.

The pioneer teachers deserve well of the present generation. They

laid the foundations of our school system broad and deep and built a substantial structure on them—incomplete, unfinished and weak in places it may be. It is yours to strengthen the weak places. If top-heavy with excessive ornamentation, trim off these. In your chosen profession don't be a poll parrot, repeating catch phrases; think your own thoughts and utter them, too. Don't be the servile imitator of other methods; invent your own and use them if they are better suited to your needs than the imported ones of the institute orator, imported also. "Boost Home Products" of brain as well as of brawn.